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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

50 CFR Part 622

[Docket No. 140501394-5279-02]

RTID 0648-XS034

Fisheries of the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and South Atlantic; 2020 Commercial Accountability Measure and Closure for South Atlantic Blueline Tilefish

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Temporary rule; closure.

SUMMARY: NMFS implements an accountability measure (AM) for commercial blueline tilefish in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the South Atlantic. Commercial landings of blueline tilefish are projected to reach the commercial annual catch limit (ACL) by August 11, 2020. Therefore, NMFS is closing the commercial sector for blueline tilefish in the South Atlantic EEZ on August 11, 2020, and it will remain closed until the start of the next fishing year on January 1, 2021. This closure is necessary to protect the blueline tilefish resource.

DATES: This temporary rule is effective at 12:01 a.m., eastern time, on August 11, 2020, until 12:01 a.m., eastern

time, on January 1, 2021.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Frank Helies, NMFS

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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The snapper-grouper fishery of the South Atlantic includes blueline tilefish and is managed under the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (FMP). The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and NMFS prepared the FMP, and the FMP is implemented by NMFS under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) by regulations at 50 CFR part 622. All weights in this temporary rule are given in round weight.

As specified at 50 CFR 622.193(z)(1)(i), the commercial ACL for blueline tilefish is 87,521 lb (39,699 kg). However, NMFS recently published a final rule that increases the commercial ACL for blueline tilefish to 117,148 lb (53,137 kg) (85 FR 43145, July 16, 2020). That final rule becomes effective on August 17, 2020.

The commercial AM for blueline tilefish requires NMFS to close the commercial sector when the its ACL is reached, or is projected to be reached, by filing a notification to that effect with the Office of the Federal Register (50 CFR

622.193(z)(1)(i)). NMFS has projected that for the 2020 fishing year, the current and pending new commercial ACLs for South Atlantic blueline tilefish will be reached by August 11, 2020. Accordingly, the commercial sector for South Atlantic blueline tilefish is closed effective at 12:01 a.m., eastern time, on August 11, 2020, until 12:01 a.m., eastern time, on January 1, 2021.

The operator of a vessel with a valid Federal commercial vessel permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper having blueline tilefish on board must have landed and bartered, traded, or sold such blueline tilefish prior to August 11, 2020. During the commercial closure, all sale or purchase of blueline tilefish is prohibited. The harvest or possession of blueline tilefish in or from the South Atlantic EEZ is limited to the recreational bag and possession limits specified in 50 CFR 622.187(b)(2) and 622.187(c)(1), respectively, while the recreational sector for blueline tilefish is open. These bag and possession limits apply in the South Atlantic on board a vessel with a valid Federal commercial or charter vessel/headboat permit for South Atlantic snapper-grouper, and apply to the harvest of blueline tilefish in both state and Federal waters.

Classification

The Regional Administrator for the NMFS Southeast Region has determined this temporary rule is necessary for the conservation and management of blueline tilefish and the South Atlantic snapper-grouper fishery and is consistent with the FMP, the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and other applicable laws.

This action is taken under 50 CFR 622.193(z)(1)(i) and is exempt from review under Executive Order 12866.

These measures are exempt from the procedures of the Regulatory Flexibility Act because the temporary rule is issued without opportunity for prior notice and comment.

This action responds to the best scientific information available. The Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries (AA) finds that the need to immediately implement this action to close the commercial sector for blueline tilefish constitutes good cause to waive the requirements to provide prior notice and opportunity for public comment pursuant to the authority set forth in 5 U.S.C. 553(b)(B), as such prior notice and opportunity for public comment are unnecessary and contrary to the public interest. Such procedures are unnecessary because the regulations at 50 CFR 622.193(z)(1)(i) have already been subject to notice and comment, and all that remains is to notify the public of the closure. Prior notice and opportunity for public

comment are contrary to the public interest because there is a need to immediately implement this action to protect bluefin tilefish, since the capacity of the fishing fleet allows for rapid harvest of the commercial ACL. Prior notice and opportunity for public comment would require time and would potentially result in a harvest well in excess of the established commercial ACL.

For the aforementioned reasons, the AA also finds good cause to waive the 30-day delay in the effectiveness of this action under 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3).

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: July 31, 2020.

Jennifer M. Wallace,

Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

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